

NSFW

By Lucy Kirkwood

Our class had been given the opportunity to present ourselves to The Royal Court, London during their 'Present Past' initiative. My group, combined forces once we received our scripts. After multiple readthroughs both private and communal, we fashioned a schedule and assigned tasks. Our objective was to provide a future audience with a stage production that was indeed humorous, but that also maintained the relevance of the situations within the script to today's world.

We aspired to create a play that considered aspects that we believed would suit the character's personalities. The extensive research we did into each character wasn't a pointless exercise as it provided a base to work from and issued a direction to take our roles.

My first role coincided with character analysis as I chose to scrutinize themes prevalent throughout the play. 'Misogyny and sexism', 'Pressure to succeed', 'Media Manipulation', 'Emotional Toll of the Industry', 'Sexual exploitation' and 'Abusive Workplace Dynamics' were the titles I compartmentalized my themes under.

I decided to focus on the most prevalent and the most relevant of themes present. Most themes overlapped with one another whilst having individual characteristics. The most prominent aspect of them is manipulation and how casually it is used in conversations within the play's dialogue.(Holland, 2022) The primary perpetrators were the two editors (Aidan and Miranda) of the magazines featured in the play's universe, 'Doghouse' and 'Electra'. Sam and Rupert were the most fixated recipients of these tactics. What I find truly depressing is how both men left 'Doghouse' while finding new work at 'Electra' another magazine that asks the very same of them, the new job being camouflaged as 'a change' when in reality they are both faced with roles that either exploit them or use them to exploit another.

My second role was to focus on lighting for stage design. The first production of the play occurred in 2015 in the Round House Theatre, where the lighting was quite simplistic and consistent with an office setting. (Benchtheatre.org.uk, 2015)While Gilly designed the set for all three acts, I created a lighting scheme that I believe would fit within the context of the script. I was inspired by a recent play I went to see on campus, titled 'Blood Wedding' by Federico García Lorca. During an emotional altercation between two characters, red and blue spotlights shifted relatively rapidly around the set area. This served to highlight the most prominent emotions displayed by the actors.

“Every event tells a story—whether it’s a brand launch, a musical performance, or a keynote presentation. Lighting helps that story unfold in real time. Through colour, intensity, movement, and timing, lighting cues support transitions, underscore emotion, and help the audience follow the flow of the experience. Consider a theatre production. A warm amber wash creates a cozy, nostalgic feeling. A sharp, cold spotlight introduces tension. When lighting changes with the narrative, it cues the audience to respond emotionally—whether that means leaning in with curiosity or sitting back in awe.” (Innovation Lighting, 2025)

“Light and color are the colors of light, they represent an artistic form where light and color blend together, and they are also one of the most emotionally expressive artistic forms in stage lighting design. Lighting can cleverly enhance the stage's mood and atmosphere, and convey the thoughts and emotions of characters. It can seamlessly integrate into the expression of the stage's space and time, controlling the rhythm effectively. It encompasses several crucial elements in stage design, including scenery, costumes, makeup, props, and more, forming a uniquely captivating artistic temperament. Therefore, light and color in stage design constitute a significant aspect of theatrical art practice, requiring a better mastery of their application techniques.” -(Analysis of the design and use of stage lighting and artistic expressions, 2023)

While researching stage lighting, I came across a website called ‘Innovation Lighting’ which consists of blogs that delve into stage lighting and the impacts that accompany it.(Innovation Lighting, 2025) Utilizing this, during the first act I chose to introduce colour into the lighting scheme. Given that the first act takes place in the office, I set the lights as a typical office light setup. Artificial white lights would open the scenes. Once Carrie's age is revealed as fourteen, I opted to have the background lighting dim to help focus on the characters. Sam's spotlight, however, would be tinged with subtle shades of red as his panic increases. Red is quite a loud, almost aggressive colour, which is why I thought it fitting. It is hinted during the play, and we can assume, given the other reactions to the situation in the room, that this is not an isolated event. It is in consideration of this that I chose to keep their lights clinical and calm, as collective as they appear.

The second act takes place in the same office; furniture moved about. This scene describes the confrontation and discussion between Mr. Bradshaw (Carrie's Father) and Aidan in regard to the picture. While it begins as a calm introduction, Mr. Bradshaw rapidly yields to his swelling emotions, his anger and outrage trapped in an internal battle with his fear and dismay. This causes him to lash out repeatedly. He is desperate to gain some resemblance of control during the situation. I decided to help convey this through the lighting as statistically, it would help the audience follow the intensity of the scene. Similar to the shifting lights I mentioned in ‘Blood Wedding’, I opted to use reds and blues swiveling around Mr. Bradshaw. The coloured lights would be much more subtle as I don't want to distract the audience from the scene but rather help them follow the flow of it. In contrast to Mr. Bradshaw, Aidan is the person in control. His lighting would reflect this. A single spotlight, positioned on the ground, projecting his shadow up on the wall behind him. The exaggerated view of the enlarged shadow would show Aidan's position in this scene. It doesn't waver even when Mr. Bradshaw threatens to go to the newspapers. Given that the ‘Doghouse’ magazine displays women's bodies, I chose to have the silhouette reflect this as it is up on the wall.

The third act is set in the editor's office of ‘Electra’. The magazine is targeted towards women; however, it consists of articles and such that zero in on women's bodies. It uses what is publicly considered ‘attractive’ and creates impossible social standards. It is incredibly stereotypical as, in reality, the magazine is misogyny disguised as feminism. Gilly and I wanted the atmosphere to support this. The set designed by Gilly was based on stereotypical girl colours. Again, the lighting would be subtle; bright pinks would peak through the office-style lights, settling in on a hot pink when Sam succumbs to the pressures of industry. Similar to Aidan, Miranda would also have a shadow cast, however, hers would project across the floor to emphasize the magazine's purpose to tear women down.

I tasked myself with creating a props list. This consisted of me once again combining through the script, taking note of all items mentioned then researching what would typically be in offices during 2012. This was a rather simple yet important route to consider for the play. Most props used are easily assessable or simple enough to

create. The biggest difficulty in terms of props would be the two neon signs of the magazine names. The price range of custom signs depends on size and could reach hundreds of pounds. For the set, there would be rather large signs. It is possible to purchase materials and create your own. [Tutorials are available on YouTube.](#) (Khaist Neon Arts, 2023)

[My final contribution to the group project involved an integration of skills I obtained through a different module on our course, 'Principles of Design' where we were taught the art of model making. To help incorporate other areas of our course into my base thinking,](#) I fashioned together a scale model of our proposed set. I began with the basic platform we first learned how to construct. I cut a hole into the wall that would allow the quick change to the neon sign (made from Kappa foam and covered with ticket card) for the set change between the second and third act. I created chairs and a sofa with the same foam and PVA glue. This proved rather difficult given the size I made them, so I used toothpicks, cut them down to size and pushed them through the foam to attach them more firmly. Everything else was rather simple to make.

My Evaluation

I am rather pleased with our performance during this project, and I did enjoy integrating previous skills learned to aid in our pitch. I do believe we were somewhat successful in describing our vision. In hindsight I could have done more during the actual presentation to describe the origins of my inspirations. I do attribute that to nerves as this was my first time pitching an idea such as this.

Bibliography

- Holland, M. (2022). 17 Manipulation Tactics Abusers Use. [online] Choosing Therapy. Available at: <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/manipulation-tactics/>.
- Innovation Lighting. (2025). How Stage Lighting Impacts Audience Emotion and Engagement. [online] Available at: <https://www.innovationlighting.net/how-stage-lighting-impacts-audience-emotion-and-engagement/>.
- Benchtheatre.org.uk. (2015). NSFW (Not Safe for Work) Written by Lucy Kirkwood. [online] Available at: <https://www.benchtheatre.org.uk/plays10s/nsfw.php> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2025].
- Analysis of the design and use of stage lighting and artistic expressions. (2023). Art and performance letters, 4(9). doi:<https://doi.org/10.23977/artpl.2023.040906>.
- Khaist Neon Arts (2023). How to make a Neon Sign | A Beginner to Pro Tutorial. [online] YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTalyyd6Z7I> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2024].

Appendix

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTalyyd6Z7I>





